

Michigan State Employees Association, AFSCME Local 5
Testimony Before the House Oversight and Investigations Committee
May 22, 2007

Good afternoon Chairman Tobocman and members of the committee. My name is Todd Tennis, and I am here on behalf of the Michigan State Employees Association – AFSCME Local 5. We represent 5,000 state workers across Michigan. We are very concerned about the impact that House Bill 4805 would have upon our members.

House Bill 4805 seeks to place limits on the health care benefits of unionized state employees. It would statutorily cap health benefits to the level of non-unionized state workers. We understand that the state is in a dire fiscal crisis – an ongoing crisis which state workers have made hefty sacrifices to address over the past four years. However, House Bill 4805 is an assault on the collective bargaining process that is patently unfair to organized state employees.

The current health benefits for state workers have been the subject of a collective bargaining process that recognizes give and take. Union officials represent the will of their members at the bargaining table. Often, this means that the union will make sacrifices in order to enhance a wage, benefit or working condition. House Bill 4805 fails to take into account decades of contractual negotiations which have resulted in the current level of benefits enjoyed by state workers.

State workers have shown their willingness to make sacrifices for the good of the state. They have given up millions of dollars in compensation through banked leave time and furlough days that have been critical in helping Michigan get its fiscal house in order. Sadly, due to the structural nature of our deficit and the ongoing economic slump, these sacrifices have been in vain. We cannot cut our way out of this problem, and this unfair attack on state worker health care benefits would only be a temporary solution in any case.

Michigan deserves better. Michigan workers deserve better. It is time for the Legislature and the Governor to stop balancing the budget on the backs of state employees. It is time instead to find a long-term solution to our continuing fiscal crisis by providing sufficient revenues.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am happy to answer any questions you have.